

Message Text

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PAGE 01 DUBLIN 01576 301419Z

44

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INFO AMEMBASSY LONDON

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SUBJ: GOVERNMENT WINS IMPORT BY-ELECTION

1. BY-ELECTION IN CO. MONAGHAN NOV 27 GENERATED INTENSIVE PUBLIC INTEREST AND BROUGHT TURNOUT OF NEAR 80 PERCENT. FINE GAEL (SENIOR MEMBER OF GOVERNING COALITION) WON BY NARROW MARGIN OF LESS THAN ONE PERCENT AGAINST ATTRACTIVE FIANNA FAIL CANDIDATE. LABOUR HAD NOT ENTERED RACE. REPUBLICAN AND MAOIST CANDIDATES MADE POOR SHOWING.

2. THIS WAS CREDITABLE PERFORMANCE BY GOVT, ESPECIALLY CONSIDERING FACT THAT IT TOOK SEAT FROM FIANNA FAIL. (BY-ELECTION WAS FOR SEAT VACATED BY PRESIDENT CHILDERS.) CONSIDERING NARROW MARGIN OF VICTORY, HOWEVER, NO SWEEPING CONCLUSIONS SHOULD BE DRAWN. MONAGHAN, A BORDER DISTRICT, HAS TWO IMPORTANT MINORITY GROUPS WHICH ARE NOT TYPICAL OF REPUBLIC AS A WHOLE: PROTESTANTS (ABOUT 10 PERCENT OF ELECTORATE) AND HARDLINE REPUBLICANS. LAW AND ORDER WAS THUS LEADING CAMPAIGN ISSUE, AND ECONOMIC PROBLEMS GENERATED LOWER VOTER INTEREST. PROTESTANT VOTE APPARENTLY WENT TO FINE GAEL AS BEST GUARANTEE OF SECURITY. REPUBLICAN VOTE MUST HAVE GONE LARGELY TO SMALL AONTACHT EIREANN, WITH SOME TO FIANNA FAIL.

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3. BY-ELECTION GIVES GOVT COALITION MUCH MORE SLID POSITION IN

DAIL. FINE GAEL AND LBOR NOW HAVE 74 SEATS AS AGAINST 68 FOR FIANNA FAIL, 2 FOR INDEPENDENTS. THIS MAKES IT VERY UNLIKELY THAT ANY COMBINATION OF INDEPENDENTS AND DEFECTORS COULD UNSEAT GOVT IN NEXT FEW MONTHS. BY THEN, GOVT SHOULD HAVE PUSHED THROUGH REDISTRICTING BILL, WHICH WILL IMPROVE CHANCES IN NEXT GENERAL ELECTIONS. LONG-TERM ELECTORAL PROJECTIONS MUST, OF COURSE, BE VIEWED WITH CAUTION: ONE YEAR AGO FIANNA FAIL LOOKED LIKE STAYING IN POWER FOREVER. FOR NOW, HOWEVER, ONLY VISIBLE POTENTIAL THREAT TO CURRENT GOVT WOULD BE SLEF-DESTRUCTION IN FEUD BETWEEN LIBERAL AND CONSERVATIVE FACTIONS. MOST OF LABOUR AND PART OF FINE GAEL IS LIBERAL; PART OF FINE GAEL REMAINS CONSERVATIVE. BUT THERE IS NOT YET ANY SIGN OF TROUBLE.

4. BLOW IS FARILY SEVERE FOR FIANNA FAIL, NOT BECAUSE LOSS WAS HUMILIATING BUT BECAUSE OPPOSITION LEADER LYNCH BADLY NEEDED MORALE BOOST AFTER LITTLEJOHN AFFAIR. PARTY'S VICTORY IN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION IS HARDLY REMEMBERED. THERE IS STILL WIDESPARED SPECULATION THAT LYNCH WANTS TO RESIGN, AND THIS IN ITSELF HAS WEAKEND HIS LEADERSHIP. LOSS OF LYNCH COULD AFFECT BIPARTISAN POLICY TOWARD NORTHERN IRELAND, ESPECIALLY IF HE WERE REPLACED BY HAUGHEY, A NOT-QUITE-REHABILITATED REPUBLICAN.

5. AONTACTH EIREANN SCORE -- ONLY SOME 5 PERCENT OF VOTE -- MUST GIVE HARD-LINE REPUBLICANS LITTLE REASON FOR ENCOURAGEMENT. MAOIST CANDIDATE WON ONLY 175 VOTES OUT OF TOTAL OF 39,647. POLITICIANS ARE SURPRISED HE DID EVEN THAT WELL. SEEMS CLEAR THAT FAR-LEFT CANDIDATES HAVE LITTLE APPEAL IN IRELAND OF 1973. SORENSON

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